

RESEÑAS

CRÍTICA Y ENSAYO

Patricia Hart. *The Spanish Sleuth. The Detective in Spanish Fiction.*, New Jersey, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987, 252 pp.

Hart clearly states the intent of her book in her preface. It is to introduce readers to the character of the Spanish detective, protagonist of numerous works of narrative which, while present from the 19th-century forward, have come to experience a veritable proliferation in recent Spanish fiction. By extension, of course, the search for the Spanish «sleuth», as the author explains, requires an investigation of the «sleuth-makers», those authors who in one way or another have contributed to the now substantial body of Spanish detective fiction.

The particular importance of Hart's work within the parameters of a rapidly expanding body of criticism on the topic resides in its being the first monographic study available to English-speaking readers. It provides the general reader with a comprehensive survey of the topic tracing its evolution from the sleuth's origins in the works of Pardo Bazán and Alarcón through his post-modern manifestations in the early 1980s.

Hart's book also provides informative interview (conducted in 1983 and 1984) with a number of the authors studied. One wonders, however, if these interviews would not have been more useful, given the nature of the readership this work is likely to attract, if the responses had been translated into English along with the questions. Appendices provide a useful vocabulary of the slang to be found in this type of Spanish fiction and a typology of each of the sleuths «investigated».

The Spanish Sleuth is a very readable introduction to the mate-

rial studied. That Hart makes her monograph assume the structure of an investigation allows her work's search for the Spanish sleuth to duplicate structurally the content of the novels she surveys. This characteristic makes of her monograph an entertaining read, especially at those junctures where Hart describes her encounters with the excentricities of some of the more prominent contemporary sleuth-makes. Yet while such a structure and the focusing on the character of the sleuth, provides for an entertaining and accessible survey, these very same characteristics contribute to the book's most substantial shortcoming. The first arises from the insistence on judging Spanish sleuths and the novels they people against their generic predecessors. There is no doubt that some ground of comparison needs to be drawn between Spanish sleuths and their possible sources in the massive body of detective fiction that precedes them. Yet to limit critical scope of inquiry to such an evaluation seems fairly restrictive. It fails to take into account that recent scholarship on the genre has provided more expansive models of analysis that seems to me to be better equipped to deal with the reasons behind the proliferation of Spanish detectives and the fictive forms in which their adventures are couched. One could, of course, argue that a general introductory text need have no recourse to the type of theoretical frame of analysis suggested above. But to reduce the focus of the analysis of this new Spanish detective writing to what is essentially a comparison between model and modeled is to overlook a great deal of the evidence that need be examined to explain this phenomenon. Hart's frame of reference precludes her monograph's being able to evaluate the boom in Spanish detective fiction against recent Spanish fiction in general. *The Spanish Sleuth* does not, for instance, place the rise of the detective genre into the larger evolution charted by Spanish fiction during the same time frame, the latter being a subject to which much scholarship has been devoted but which is not invoked in Hart's argumentation.

It may very well be this narrative evolution that explains why much of the detective fiction written in Spain today fails to live up to the norms readers expect from the genre, since the authors may, indeed be playing with these norms to create new forms of detective fiction that willfully expand and contract the boundaries of the genre.

Would not an evaluation of the decidedly avant-garde literary proclivities of Vázquez Montalbán and his non-conformist brand of

marxism better explain why Pepe Carvalho's adventures are somewhat iconoclastic? Should not an assessment of Savater that takes into account his position as Spain's leading derridian thinker better explain the truly post-structuralist nature of *Caronte Aguarda* than an analysis that points out the implausibilities of Amador Blanco's actions? Can the works of Benet and Marsé, or any of the other novelists studied in this volume, be considered in isolation from where they are positioned in these authors' literary evolutions? Can one consider the proliferation of Spanish detective fiction without taking into account the decidedly metafiction and post-modernist turn much Spanish fiction has taken from the transition on forward? All of these are issues that need to be addressed if one is to be able to contextualize, account for, and explain the new Spanish detective novel.

In short, while Hart's book successfully completes the investigation it sets for itself —the identification of the Spanish sleuth and an explanation of his *modus operandi*— the outcome is flawed, because the investigative process itself fails to consider a large body of evidence that conceivable could have led to substantially different conclusions had it been employed. Nevertheless, future literary sleuths will invariable have to examine the substantial body of evidence Patricia Hart provides if they are to complete successfully their own investigations of this rich body of narrative material.

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MALCOLM ALAN COMPITELLO

Josep Maria Castellet. *L'hora del lector. Seguit de Poesia, realisme, història*. Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1987, 211 pp.

Todo sistema crítico basado exclusivamente en el mecanismo metodológico raramente logra trascender «el criptograma de un tiempo», como indica Georges Steiner. Por otra parte, si la metodología «mecánica» de tal sistema se deriva de cierta concepción filosófica de la realidad, la validez de la teoría literaria es menos susceptible a ser una moda más y tener pocas esperanzas de volver a ser leída o debatida al transcurrir el tiempo. En esencia, nos hallamos ante el viejo dilema de elegir acercarnos al arte a través de la crítica ideológica (o filosófica) atada al tiempo histórico, o bien decidrnos por ciertas fórmulas mecánicas utilizadas sin conciencia cronológica.